

**RECORDS OF THE COMMA *POLYGONIA C-ALBUM* L.  
(LEP.: NYMPHALIDAE) IN NORTH-EAST ENGLAND  
FROM 1995 TO 1999**

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IN A PREVIOUS paper one of us reported the remarkable improvement in the fortunes of the Comma *Polygonia c-album* L. which has occurred in Northumberland (Watsonian Vice County 67) over the period 1995-98 (Ellis, 1999). At the time there was evidence that the species was becoming re-established in the county. This view has been reinforced by further records obtained during the 1999 season, when one of us (HAE) recorded 44 adults in Northumberland. This is more than the personal total of 23 for the previous four years combined. Both the pale *hutchinsoni* Robson and normal dark forms of butterfly occurred, indicating there was a partial double brood. In addition to the adult and pupa, the ovum and larva were also found in the county, for the first time during 1999, thus verifying that the Comma is breeding in Northumberland (Ellis, 2000). Similar changes in the distribution and frequency of the Comma have occurred further south in County Durham (VC66) during the mid to late 1990s (Waller, 1997).

It therefore seems opportune at the close of the 20th century to document the present recorded distribution of the Comma in North-east England as a whole. There are now too many records to be individually listed and the data have been summarised in the accompanying distribution map (Fig. 1). For this purpose we have combined our own records for Northumberland and County Durham with those submitted by numerous other observers who regularly contribute their records to one of us (IJW) who acts as the Biological Records Centre Recorder for the counties.

The map includes all records known to us corresponding to the period 1995-99 for County Durham (VC66), South Northumberland (VC67) and North Northumberland (Cheviot, VC68). Each record is based on the presence of the species within a tetrad (2km × 2km square). Overall the Comma has been recorded in 253 tetrads within sixty-three 10km × 10km squares distributed throughout the three Vice-counties. The tetrad records tend to be concentrated towards the south-east of the region, and are less dense in the west and north. Thus only 6% of tetrads occur in VC68 compared with 37% and 57% respectively in VC67 and VC66. This distribution pattern supports our hypothesis that the Comma has become re-established from the south. However, it may well be exaggerated since there are fewer recorders active in the northernmost parts of the region (VC68).

Fig. 1 illustrates the magnitude of the change in the fortunes of the Comma compared with what is known of its previous history in the region (e.g. Cook, 1990; Ellis, 1999 & 2000). When Cook (1990) expressed the hope "that the Comma may be a more frequent sight before the end of the century", he could not possibly have imagined how widespread and relatively common the species was to become within

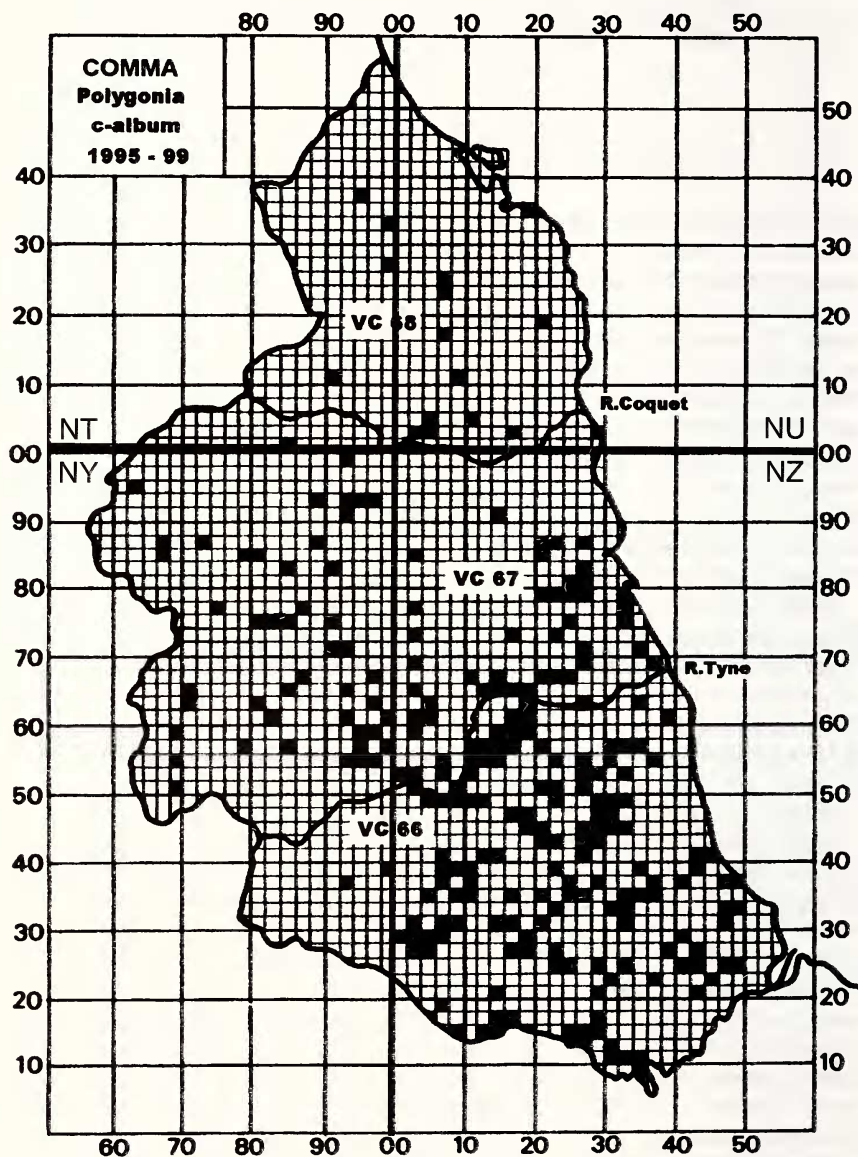


Fig. 1 Distribution map of the Comma *Polygonia C-album* L. in Durham (VC66) and Northumberland (VCs 67 & 68). The map summarises records for 1995-99. The river Tyne forms the boundary between VCs 66 & 67 in the east; the river Coquet forms the boundary between the southern and northern parts of Northumberland, VC 67 & 68 throughout.

a decade! It is truly remarkable that the Comma has recolonised North-east England so rapidly in the course of only about five years. Additionally, in that time the species has extended its range yet further northwards into Scotland (R. Buckland, pers. comm.).

It is worth mentioning that the leaves of Elm *Ulmus* trees continue to be an important foodplant for the Comma larva in North-east England. Apart from an example of a caterpillar feeding on Blackcurrant *Ribes nigrum* (Johnson, 1998) in a garden in Durham City in 1997, to date all larvae and pupae have been found on *Ulmus*.

### Acknowledgements

We wish to thank all those individuals who contributed their records of the Comma as part of Butterfly Conservation's "Butterflies for the New Millennium Project".

### References

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### *Bruchela rufipes* (Olivier) (Col.: Urodontidae) in West Suffolk

Since its original discovery in South Essex in 1984 (Hyman, 1987, *Entomologist's mon. Mag.* **123**: 90.) *Bruchela rufipes* has been expanding its range and I have been awaiting its arrival in Suffolk.

A few months ago, Paul Lee very kindly sent me a list of beetles which he had recorded whilst carrying out a contract survey at Mildenhall Airbase for the Suffolk Wildlife Trust on behalf of the USAF. Amongst his captures was *B. rufipes* which he had swept from the grassy heath there (grid reference TL 678771), on 7 July 1999.

Whilst recording at Icklingham on 26 July 2000 I swept numerous individuals from *Reseda lutea* and *R. luteola* beside a field of Flax on the edge of the Plains (TL 7673) as well as from *R. lutea* growing on a set-aside field at Canada (TL 7775).

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